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(Catukka) Sañcetanā Sutta

Or **(Catukka) Cetanā Sutta** The (Fours) Discourse on Intention | **A 4.171**
 Theme: Karma is rooted in ignorance and often occurs without our knowledge
 Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2016, 2017

1 Sutta summary and highlights

1.1 SUTTA SUMMARY AND EXPLANATIONS

1.1.1 The (Catukka) Sañcetanā Sutta (A 4.171) is a succinct text on the essential nature of karma. In the Sutta, the Buddha first explains the 3 karmic doors of action done through the body, speech and mind [§§1-3]. Then, he tells us that mental formations arise “**with ignorance as condition**” [§4]. This is, in fact, the start of dependent arising, rooted in *ignorance* and ending in various forms of suffering for us. [3.2.2.1]

1.1.2 Then, the Buddha explains how we create karma (act in a karmic manner) through the 3 doors on our own initiative (*sāmaṃ*) or on account of others (*pare*) [§§5-6, 9-10, 13-14]. We act on our own (“unprompted”) when we **initiate the action** without any instigation from others. We **act on account of others** (“prompted”) when others encourage or command us to act. (AA 3:145)

1.1.3 We can create karma with clear awareness (*sampajāna*) or without clear awareness (*asampajāna*) [§§7-8, 11-12, 15-16]. To create karma **with clear awareness** means that we act consciously, knowing the wholesome and the unwholesome nature of the act and their respective fruits. To create karma **without clear awareness** means that we do not understand the oral significance of our act. (AA 3:145)

1.1.3 Then, at the start of the closing section—which contains the key teaching—the Buddha reminds us that “**subject to ignorance ... are these states**,” that is, the arising of karma through the 3 doors, unprompted and prompted, conscious and unconscious [§17].

The Commentary explains that **these states are subject to ignorance** and function both as a co-existent condition (*saha,jāta*) and a decisive-support condition (*upanissaya*). Thus, the samsaric cycle and its root, ignorance, are shown. (AA 3:145)

1.1.4 Finally, the Buddha declares that “**with the remainderless fading away and ending of ignorance**,” all these karmic activities stop for good [§§18-25]. [3.2.2.2]

1.2 KEY TEACHING

The (Catukka) Sañcetanā Sutta (A 4.171) is a key sutta on karma. Specifically, it explains how karma arises and ceases. The Sutta’s seminal teachings are found in the second half of **the (Kamma,vāda) Bhūmija Sutta** (S 12.25), given to Ānanda¹ [3.1].

1.3 ONE SUTTA OR TWO?

1.3.1 The Pali Text Society (PTS) Pali edition treats **the (Catukka) Sañcetanā Sutta** (A 4.171) and **the Atta,bhava Paṭilābha Sutta** (A 4.172),² which follows it in the Aṅguttara, as two separate suttas. The

¹ S 12.25 (SD 31.2).

Burmese, Sinhalese and Siamese editions, however, following the Commentary (AA 3:144-148), treat A 4.171 and A 4.172 (SD 54.13) as a single sutta. While the opening paragraph of A 4.172 clearly looks like the beginning of a new sutta, and perhaps was originally, the Commentary takes it to be continuous with the analysis of intention, as given here.

It says that by the end of the Sañcetana Sutta, the Buddha has explained how karma is created through the 3 doors of action. Then, in **the Vibhatti Sutta**, he shows where that karma ripens as an acquisition of personality (*atta.bhava,paṭilābha*), that is, the arising of a being. “Acquisition of personality” (*atta.bhāva-p,paṭilābha*) is an individual existence, a combination of body and mind that constitutes a particular life.

1.3.2 The name *vibhatti*, “analysis, classification”—and the title **Vibhatti Sutta**—better applies to the sutta after the *Atta,bhava Paṭilābha*, that is, **A 4.173**, on the 4 analytic knowledges (*paṭisambhidā*), and which is taught by Sāriputta to the monks.

2 The nature of intention

2.1 HOW KARMA ARISES: THE 3 DOORS:

Karma—the natural moral reality that seeks and works with its own kind—occurs through the 3 doors of body, speech and mind. Karma is intention,³ often this means a deliberate act, especially which is mindfully done. However, as we shall see, an important aspect of karma (often overlooked or misunderstood) is that it is often a habitual act, both good and bad. [2.2]

2.2 NATURE OF INTENTIONS

2.2.1 Hidden intentions

In this second half, the Buddha explains that not all karmic actions are done with full awareness or consciously (*sampajāna*).⁴ The same theme is found in **the Cetanā Sutta 1** (S 12.38)—a very important text in this connection—where it is stated that karma still works without our being aware of it, that is, we are often driven by our **latent tendencies** (*anusaya*):⁵ [3.1.3]

⁶If, bhikkhus, one neither thinks nor plans, but if one is still driven by latent tendencies (*anuseti*)⁷—this is a mental basis (*ārammaṇa*) that supports consciousness.

When there is a mental basis, there is a support for consciousness.

² A 4.173 (SD 54.13).

³ From the well known statement of the Buddha: “Karma is intention, I say” (*cetanā’ham vadāmi*): **Nibbedhika (Pariyāya) S** (A 6.63/3:415), SD 6.11; SD 48.1 (9.1.3).

⁴ See *Saṅkhāra*, SD 17.6 (6.2) & (8.2).

⁵ See *Anusaya*, SD 31.3.

⁶ *No ce bhikkhave ceteti no ce pakappeti atha ce anuseti, ārammaṇam etaṃ hoti viññāṇassa ṭhitiyā.*

⁷ “**But one is still driven by latent tendencies**” (*atha ce anuseti*): the latent tendencies are included because they have not been abandoned here in the resultants of the three planes, in the limited functional states (the five-door adverting and mind-door adverting cittas), and in form. As long as the latent tendencies exist, they become a condition for the karmic consciousness; for there is no way to prevent its arising. See Intro (2) for more details.

When consciousness has a support and grows, there is **further [continued] arising of re-birth.**

When there is the further arising of rebirth, there further arise birth, decay-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and despair.

Such is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.⁸ (S 12.38.3/2:65), SD 7.6

2.2.2 Karma, conscious and unconscious

2.2.2.1 We often understand that to act “**intentionally**” means to act fully aware (*sampajāna*), that is, understanding both the action and its fruit, that is, to act deliberately. However, more often, we act without being fully aware (*asampajāna*), that is, without any such knowledge, that is, to act indeliberately, that is, without a thought (SA 2:58). We simply think, speak and act out of habit.

As a rule, we do our job or our hobby without a thought—but there is an underlying, even unconscious, sense of hating our work or delighting in our hobby: this is **greed** and **hate** at work! An extreme example is that of a hunter. He may rationalize that the prey “is there,” or that he “enjoys” the past-time and bears neither *desire* nor *hate* for the prey—but clearly, there is **delusion**: the notion that we have the right to take the lives of others, or that we are doing nothing wrong.

2.2.2.2 Intention, then, is a very subtle and elusive reality: we may not always be aware that we are *intending* to do something, we may *not* even be aware that we are deliberately committing an act—we simply act out of habit. A simple example is that of a professional assassin, or even a butcher—he kills so habitually that he may feel neither *greed* nor *hate* over his actions, but there is always delusion.

A habitual bad act, even when *unconsciously* done is still functionally intentional. Psychologically, that bad habit has been “wired” deeper into our mind that lies below the radar of the conscious mind—hence, we are not *aware* that our act is unwholesome. However, if there is *greed*, *hate* or *delusion* present behind the action, it is clearly intentional. In other words, such karma will bear fruit when the conditions are right.

2.2.3 Dealing with karma

2.2.3.1 As such, it is not enough that we avoid doing bad *consciously*, that we do not create bad karma “deliberately.” We must ensure that we are not being subtly manipulated by our latent tendencies, our **unconscious**, that record and replay our bad habits. **The precepts** or moral conduct can only control our conscious bad habits—not to *consciously* kill, steal, misconduct oneself sexually, lie or get drunk or drugged—but they cannot prevent or stop our *unconscious* moral lapses.

2.2.3.2 We need **meditation** to reach the deeper limits of our mind to correct these bad habits. It is helpful to note here that a strong practice of **lovingkindness** helps us in this karmic correction and alleviation process.⁹ What we have here is *a Buddhist psychology of the unconscious*.¹⁰

⁸ Comy says that this section refers to the moment when there is occurrence of volition of the 3 planes, and no occurrence of mental fabrications of craving and views (SA 2:71). See **Cetanā S 1** (S 12.38) (3) for details.

⁹ On how lovingkindness can limit our karma, see SD 2.10 (2); **Karaja, kāya Brahma, vihāra S** (A 10.208) + SD 2.10 (1+2); SD 3.9 (7.2.3).

¹⁰ See **The unconscious**, SD 17.8b.

3 Ignorance and formation

3.1 IGNORANCE

3.1.1 The root of karma

3.1.1.1 Karma arises from **ignorance**—not intellectual ignorance, but existential ignorance, a lack of proper understanding of the true nature of life and its conditions.¹¹ Karma can be understood as the dependent arising of suffering. In the dependent arising formula, we have this starting sequence of the first 4 links, as, for example, laid out in **the Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15) [1], thus:

Ignorance → formations → consciousness → name-and-form → ... (suffering).¹²

3.1.1.2 Our view-formation is best understood as starting with **ignorance** (*avijjā*), which moves us with the craving to act or not to act, to be or not to be. Motivated by **craving** in the form of lust, hate and delusion. We are driven by **intentions** as the formations (*saṅkhārā*) arising through mind, speech and body. This feeds our consciousness or “conscious body” (*sa,viññāṇaka kāya*)¹³—body, speech and mind—making us more sensitive and sophisticated at detecting and “making sense” of experiences, that is, at constructing name-and-form (*nāma,rūpa*) out of them—giving names to forms, giving forms to names, making sense of things, rationalizing, conning oneself with reasons for everything that confront us. Everything, we think, happens for a reason: *our* reason.

3.1.2 Karma formation

3.1.2.1 We form **views** on a deeply mental level, rooted in mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), when we are driven by an intention to form ideas in our mind, and then to *speak* and *act* on them. The mind, too, creates its own ideas and plans of greed, hate, delusion and fear.

Such views, ideas and biases are unstable: they *rise and fall* with the moment, and will not really trouble us if we neither pursue them nor store them as memories or images in our consciousness—as “prototypes” or fixed views (first, as *conceptions*, and later as *perceptions*): our actions (through mind, speech and body) are somehow dictated by such mental “prototypes.”

And so we cognize and recognize, we act and react, to the external stimuli of our own self-created sense-experiences. We get caught up with the **memes** we have projected into our virtual-reality world. [3.1.2.2]

3.1.2.2 This is where we construct **views of an abiding self**, or wish for or believe in an immortal soul by identifying with our body, its features and actions, or feelings, or perceptions, or formations (intentions), or consciousness (general awareness of things)—these are the 5 aggregates.¹⁴ With this habitual pattern of dependent arising, we form self-views and world-views—our philosophies of life. This is where we can and must end these view-formations before we are swallowed up whole by them.

A view, then, is a very private but potent idea of our world of experiences that attracts more of its kind to itself: it is a self-replication process. Views attract and breed karma, and karma is the most dreaded

¹¹ This is actually the first 2 noble truths which define the meaning of life: see SD 1.1 (4.0).

¹² **Kaccā(ya)na,gotta Sutta** (S 12.15/2:16 f), SD 6.13.

¹³ On *sa,viññāṇaka kaya*, see SD 17.8a (12.3).

¹⁴ For an important study of the 5 aggregates, begin with **(Dve) Khandha S** (S 22/48), SD 17.1.a.

of replicators.¹⁵ Karma is a self-replicating mental process whose only purpose is to feed, grow and multiply itself so that it becomes immortal, as it were. Psychologically, this is called a **meme**.¹⁶ [3.2]

3.1.3 Latent tendencies

3.1.3.1 Once we assimilate any views—or rather *when a view assimilates “us”*—it “**lies latent or dormant**” (*anuseti*) like a virus, gathering strength through our continued keeping, feeding and growing them. Our unfettered sense-experiences—measuring people, liking and disliking things—feed these mental viruses that infest our “unconscious”—in fact, they *are* our **unconscious, the latent tendencies** (*anusaya*), that control our thought, speech and action, like a puppet-master holding and playing with us with his many strong strings of lust, hate and delusion.

3.1.3.2 Our views—or rather, the roots of these views: *lust, hate and delusion* in their various forms—lie latent in our unconscious (we do not even know they are there). But at every opportune moment, they **assail** (*samudācaranti*) us tenaciously bending, twisting and crushing us to reinforce our identity with **self-view** (“This is *me*”), to measure our self against others with **conceit** (“This *I am*”), and relentlessly pushing us to do this with **craving** (“This is *mine!*”).¹⁷

3.1.4 Mental proliferation

3.1.4.2 When we grasp a view, we take the shape of that view. We become our view: we think, speak and act *as* those views. It is like living in blinding darkness and looking into it. Then, as our eyes adjust to the darkness, we begin to make out things. The reality is that when we stare into this darkness, it stares back at us with images that we project from our own minds—our greed, hate, delusion and fear.

3.1.4.3 Each view leads to many more: they proliferate; one thought arouses many others—leading to a **mental proliferation** (*papañca*). We are drowned in our thoughts; they overflow through our speech and actions drowning others, too, especially those already drowning in their own thoughts.¹⁸

And so we become our views—as we think, so we are—we exist through them, and are reborn as them to repeat and replay everything all over again, as long as we are unawakened. Hence, in **the Sallekha Sutta**, for example, the Buddha teaches us how to break this vicious cycle and completely free ourself from suffering and rebirth.¹⁹

3.2 FORMATION (*sañkhāra*)

3.2.1 Definitions

3.2.1.1 The term ***sañkhāra*** is resolved as *saṃ* (= con, “together”) + √KR, “to do,” from which comes the verb *karoti*, “he does, he makes.” Hence, *sañkhāra* has the sense of “putting something together.” In

¹⁵ On the imagery of replicators, see SD 44.1 (6.4.2).

¹⁶ **Memes**, SD 26.3.

¹⁷ For studies, see **I: The nature of identity**, SD 19.1; **Me: The nature of conceit**, SD 19.2a; **Mine: The nature of craving**, SD 19.3.

¹⁸ On mental proliferation (*papañca*), see **Madhu, piṇḍika S** (M 18) SD 6.14 (2). On non-identifying with sense-objects, see **Atammayatā**, SD 19.13.

¹⁹ **Sallekha Sutta** (M 8), SD 51.8.3

fact, it literally means “constructing, construction.”²⁰ The noun has both the active and the passive senses. As such, *saṅkhārā* are both the things that *deliberately* put together, construct and compound the things that *are* put together, constructed and compounded with love, hate, faith and fear.²¹

3.2.1.2 The suttas define *saṅkhāra* primarily in terms of will or volition (*cetanā*). This is to willfully put together (*abhisāṅkharoti*)—more often, in the plural, *abhisāṅkharonti*—each of the aggregates (*khandha*) (form, feeling, formations and consciousness), in turn, into something that is “put together” or “conditioned” (*saṅkhata*).²² However, although we think we are “willing” our actions, the reality is that our “will” has, more often than not, already been decided for us by our unconscious.²³

In other words, we do not really have any **free will**, although we are often deluded into thinking so. Perhaps, in our moments of great charity, love or wisdom, we are both *willing* and *able* to get the better of ourself and do what is right, or not doing what is wrong. We then renounce “the world,” so to speak—we let go of what is wrong. Nothing in the world is ours anyway: we must let it go. Then, we begin to be free of our will altogether and awaken to true reality. To be really free, then, we must let go of what is not ours.²⁴

3.2.1.3 As such, *saṅkhārā* (pl) are conditioning factors acting as active volitional forces. Intention (*cetanā*) is, of course, understood as karma (*kamma*) on the mental level.²⁵ In the early Abhidhamma texts, all those mental factors that are considered to be specifically skilful (*kusala*) are subsumed under “the aggregate of formations” (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*).²⁶

Hence, the composition of our aggregate of formations (*saṅkhāra-k,khandha*) leads the way or is primary²⁷ in determining whether a particular arising of consciousness is wholesome or unwholesome karma. All this is well attested by the suttas’ highlighting intention as characterizing the nature of formations.²⁸ Good intentions create good formations: in this sense, good begets good.²⁹

3.2.1.4 Formation (*saṅkhāra*), as used in **the Sañcetana Sutta**, is, technically, the 2nd link of dependent arising, that is, as a mental “condition” (*paccaya*) or “link (cause)” (*nidāna*) in our karmic cycle. Formation as a condition or link is also the *formation* as an aggregate (*khandha*). It is the active “producing” or “generating” karmic conditioner.³⁰

As the 2nd link of dependent arising, formations are the karmically active volitions responsible, in conjunction with ignorance and craving, for producing rebirth and clinging on to the wheel of existence--

²⁰ S 22.79/3:87. See also BDict: *saṅkhāra*.

²¹ For defs of *saṅkhāra*, see Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience*, 1996:66-81 (ch 4).

²² Eg, **Khandha Saṃyutta** defs, S 3:59 f, 86 f.

²³ See **Free will and Buddhism**, SD 7.7 (12).

²⁴ See **Alagaddūpama S** (M 22,40) & SD 3.13 (4.2).

²⁵ (**Chakka**) **Samādhī S** (A 6.70/3:425).

²⁶ “This is most simply expressed at Dhk 9 where the truth of arising and the truth of the path are said to be *saṅkhārakkhandha*; it is elaborated at Dhs 185-225, and at Vbh 63-69, where the various categories of unskillful *dharmas* are treated in terms of the *khandhas*.” (See Gethin 1953:37)

²⁷ Cf Vism 14.135.

²⁸ On the different meanings of *saṅkhāra*, see SD 17.6 (5). On *saṅkhāra* (sg) and *saṅkhārā* (pl), see SD 40a.9 (2.4.4).

²⁹ See Dh 1+2. However, in karma, good does not always beget good, or bad bad, but is more complicated than this consequentialist over-simplification: see **Isayo Samuddaka S** (S 903*) + SD 39.2 (2); SD 3,5 (1); SD 4.16 (2.5).

³⁰ S 2:5; Vbh 144, 173. See (**Paṭicca,samuppāda**) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2.12) n in SD 5.10 (2004).

as such, they are best rendered as “volitional activities” or “karma-formations” to distinguish them from the passive “formations” of **the Kāma,bhū Sutta 2** (S 41.6).³¹

This latter set (*passive* formations) is used only in the context of the attainment of the cessation of perception and feeling,³² and never used in connection with dependent arising.³³ In **the (Pacetana) Ratha,kāra Sutta** (A 3.15), however, we see this meaning applied to **abhisāṅkhāra**, that includes the broader sense of the aggregates (as the karma of the 3 doors).³⁴

3.2.1.5 The Sañcetanā Sutta (A 4.171) often mentions the 3 volitional formations—bodily formations, verbal formations and mental formations (respectively, *kāya,saṅkhāra, vacī,saṅkhāra, mano,saṅkhāra*): the karmic creations of body, speech and mind. Karma is our creator.

According to the Sutta, we create them “by ourself” (*sāmam*) when we act without being induced by others [§5], with an unprompted mind (*asaṅkhārika,citta*); we create them “on account of others” (*pare*) [§6] when we act with a prompted mind (*saṅkhārika,citta*), that is, on account of others.³⁵

3.2.2 Uprooting karma: Ending ignorance

3.2.2.1 The Sañcetanā Sutta first explains the 3 karmic doors of bodily actions, verbal actions and mental actions [§§1-3], and then tells us that mental formations arise “with ignorance as condition” [§4]. This is, in fact, the start of our dependent arising, rooted in ignorance and ending in various forms of suffering for us.

3.2.2.2 The Sutta then explains how karmic actions arise through the 3 doors on *our own initiative* (“unprompted”) or *on account of others* (“prompted”) [§§5-6, 9-10, 13-14], and *consciously* done or *unconsciously* done [§§7-8, 11-12, 15-16].

Then, at the start of the closing section, the Buddha reminds us that “**subject to ignorance ... are these states,**” that is, the arising of karma through the 3 doors, unprompted and prompted, conscious and unconscious [§17].

Finally, the Buddha declares that “**with the remainderless fading away and ending of ignorance,**” all these karmic activities stop for good [§§18-25]. Remove ignorance, karma ends. Ignorance can only be properly removed with a full and right understanding of the 4 noble truths.³⁶

In simple terms, this means that without ignorance—that is, with *awakened wisdom*—there will be no more arising of the 5 aggregates, the bases of all our experiences, and there is total freedom from being troubled by the experiences of pleasure and pain. We are awakened and liberated as arhats, like the Buddha.

3.2.2.3 How do we cultivate the wisdom that leads to awakening? The Buddha gives us a simple but potent method in the conclusion of his teachings on the layperson’s welfare called **the Dīgha,jānu Sutta** (A 8.54), that is, in “the accomplishment of wisdom” (*paññā sampadā*), defined as follows:

Here, Vyagghapajja, the son of family is

³¹ S 41.6/4:293.

³² See **Ariya Pariyesanā S** (M 26.42/1:275) n in SD 1.11 (2003a).

³³ See SD 17.6 (5.3.2) usage (6).

³⁴ A 3.15/1:110-113 (SD 17.7). On the term’s usage as “aggregate,” see foll def.

³⁵ It is possible that the Abhidhamma distinction between *sasaṅkhārika,citta* and *asaṅkhārika,citta* is rooted in a text such as this: see Abhs:BRS 1.4. (S:B 561 n78).

³⁶ On the 4 noble truths, see SD 1.1 (4.0).

wise, possesses wisdom directed to the rising and falling away (of phenomena)³⁷

that is noble and penetrative, leading to the complete destruction of suffering.³⁸

This, Vyagghapajja, is called the accomplishment of wisdom. (A 8.54,15), SD 5.10

3.2.2.4 Wisdom (*paññā*)—rightly seeing into the true nature of things—is the proximate basis for awakening and liberation. The basis for the practice leading to wisdom is “the wisdom directed to **the rising and falling away (of phenomena)**” (*uday’attha, gāmi*).³⁹ This is the meditation and mindfulness of impermanence, especially the perception of impermanence (*abnicca, saññā*)—as laid out in all the 10 suttas of **the Okkanta Saṃyutta** (S 25).

The regular perception of impermanence—whether done simply out of faith or carefully rooted with wisdom—is guaranteed by the Buddha, in **the (Anicca) Cakkhu Sutta** (S 25.1) (the first of the 10 suttas in the Okkanta Saṃyutta), to bring us streamwinning—the very first step on the noble path of awakening. With this practice, we will attain streamwinning in this life itself, if not, certainly at the moment of passing away.⁴⁰

4 Related suttas

4.1 THE (KAMMA,VĀDA) BHŪMIJA SUTTA (S 12.13)

The (Catukka) Sañcetanā Sutta (A 4.171) recurs in the second half of **the (Kamma,vādā) Bhūmija Sutta** (S 12.13), its key section, where Ānanda is addressed instead of “bhikshus” (*bhikkhave*).⁴¹ There are at least two possible explanations for this:

- (1) the Saṃyutta Reciters and the Aṅguttara Reciters drew from the same ancient source (urtext) but separately attributed them to actors known to them, or
- (2) the two reciter traditions, each codified the teaching as they had remembered it, giving their own narrative frame.

In either case, it is possible that the Sutta records the same teaching given on two separate occasions.

4.2 OTHER SAÑCETANĀ SUTTAS

4.2.1 The (Rāhula) Sutta (S 18.7/2:247 f)

The Buddha asks Rāhula about intention regarding the 6 sense-objects, whether it is permanent or impermanent. Rāhula replies that it is impermanent. The Buddha says that a noble disciple who sees things in this way becomes revulsed with intentions, becomes dispassionate (lust-free) and so is freed.

4.2.2 The (Khandha) Sañcetanā Sutta (S 26.7/3:230)

The Buddha teaches the monks that the arising, continuation, production and manifestation of intention regarding form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness is the arising of suffering itself. The cessation, subsiding and fading away of craving regarding form, etc, is the cessation of suffering.

³⁷ On watching the rise and fall of feeling, see **(Aññathatta) Ānanda S 1** (S 22.37/3:37 f), SD 33.11.

³⁸ For its significance, see **(Sotāpanna) Nandiya S** (S 55.40), esp SD 47.1 (1.1.3.3).

³⁹ On directed cultivation, see further **Bhikkhuṇī Vāsaka S** (S 47.10/5:154-157), SD 24.2 (1.2).

⁴⁰ S 25.1 (SD 16.7).

⁴¹ S 12.13,13-19.2 (SD 31.2).

4.2.3 The (Kilesa) Sañcetanā Sutta (S 27.7/3:233)

The Buddha teaches the monks that desire and lust for intention regarding form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness are the corruption of the mind. When we abandon mental corruption, the mind becomes wieldy regarding those things to be realized by direct knowledge.

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(Catukka) Sañcetanā Sutta The (Fours) Discourse on Intention

A 4.171

The 3 doors of action

1 *Kāye* vā bhikkhave sati
kaya,sañcetanā,hetu uppajjati [158]
ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ
2 *vācāya* vā bhikkhave sati
vacī,sañcetanā,hetu uppajjati
ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ
3 *mane* vā bhikkhave sati
mano,sañcetanā,hetu uppajjati
ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ
4 *avijjā,paccayā* vā.⁴²

1 Bhikshus, when there is **the body**,
then, there arise, with bodily intention as cause,
internal [personal] pleasure and pain.
2 Bhikshus, when there is **speech**,
then, there arise, with verbal intention as cause,
internal pleasure and pain.
3 Bhikshus, when there is **mind**,
then, there arise, with mental intention as cause,
internal pleasure and pain—
4 with ignorance as condition.⁴³

Bodily actions: conscious and unconscious

5 *Sāmaṃ* vā taṃ⁴⁴ bhikkhave
*kaya,sañkhāram abhisāṅkaroti*⁴⁵
yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati
ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ
6 *pare* vā'ssa⁴⁶ taṃ bhikkhave
*kaya,sañkhāram abhisāṅkaroti*⁴⁷
yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati
ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ

5 Either by oneself, bhikshus,
one creates **bodily formation**,
conditioned by which there arise
internal pleasure and pain;
6 or, on account of others, bhikshus,
one creates bodily formation,
conditioned by which there arise
internal pleasure and pain;

⁴² Be Be:King Ce *avijjā,paccayā* va; Ee Se *avijjā,paccayā* vā.

⁴³ "Ignorance as condition." Comy: This section shows that pleasure and pain do not arise conditioned by contact alone, but with other conditions as well. In this case, bodily intentions (*kāya,sañcetanā*), verbal intentions (*vacī,sañcetanā*) and mental intentions (*mano,sañcetanā*) are the karmically effective intentions that function as conditions for the resultant pleasure and pain (*vipāka,sukha,dukkha*) (SA 2:57). See (**Kamma,vāda**) **Bhūmija S** (S 12.25,-13), SD 31.2.

⁴⁴ Be Be:King *vā taṃ*; Ce Se Ee *vā*.

⁴⁵ Only Ce:Tr(enckner) *abhisāṅkaroti*.

⁴⁶ Only Be:K *pare vā tassa*.

⁴⁷ Be *abhisāṅkaronti*; Ee *abhisāṅkaroti*.

7 *sampajāno* *vā taṃ bhikkhave kaya,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ,*

8 *asampajāno* *vā taṃ bhikkhave kaya,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ.*

7 Either **with clear comprehension**, bhikshus, one creates bodily formation, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

8 or, **without clear comprehension**, bhikshus, one creates bodily formation, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*

Verbal actions: conscious and unconscious

9 *Sāmaṃ* *vā taṃ bhikkhave vacī,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

10 *pare* *vā'ssa taṃ bhikkhave vacī,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

11 *sampajāno* *vā taṃ bhikkhave vacī,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

12 *asampajāno* *vā taṃ bhikkhave vacī,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

9 Either by oneself, bhikshus, one creates **verbal formation**, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

10 or, on account of others, bhikshus, one creates verbal formation, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

11 Either **with clear comprehension**, bhikshus, one creates verbal formation, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

12 or, **without clear comprehension**, bhikshus, one creates verbal formation, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*

Mental actions: conscious and unconscious

13 *Sāmaṃ* *vā taṃ bhikkhave mano,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti⁴⁸ yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

14 *pare* *vā'ssa taṃ bhikkhave mano,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati ajjhattaṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

15 *sampajāno* *vā taṃ bhikkhave mano,saṅkhāraṃ abhisāṅkharoti*

13 Either by oneself, bhikshus, one creates **mental formation**,⁴⁹ *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

14 or, on account of others, bhikshus, one creates mental formation, *conditioned by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

15 Either **with clear comprehension**, bhikshus, one creates mental formation,

⁴⁸ Only Ce:Tr *abhisāṅkharoti*.

⁴⁹ *Mano,saṅkhāra*, in this context, is clearly syn with *citta,saṅkhāra* in (Paṭicca,samuppāda) **Vibhaṅga S** (S 12.2,-14/2:4), SD 5.15; see S:B 727 n7. However, here we cannot identify the latter with the *citta,saṅkhāra* at **Kāma,bhū S 2** (S 41.6,5.2+7.2/4:293), SD 48.7, & **Cūḷa Vedalla S** (M 44,15.1+4/1:301) + SD 40a.9 (2.4.3), where both def *citta,-saṅkhāra* as *saññā* and *vedanā*; see S:B 749 n79.

*yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati
ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ,*

*conditioned by which there arise
internal pleasure and pain;*

16 *asampajāno* vā taṃ bhikkhave
mano,sañkhāraṃ abhisañkharoti
*yaṃ paccayā'ssa taṃ uppajjati
ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ.*

16 or, **without clear comprehension**, bhikkhus,
one creates mental formation,
*conditioned by which there arise
internal pleasure and pain.*

Dependent ending of karma

17 *Imesu bhikkhave dhammesu avijjā anupatitā*

17 Subject to **ignorance**, bhikkhus, are these
states.⁵⁰

18 *avijjāya tv-eva asesā,virāga,nirodhā*

18 With the remainderless fading away and
ending of *ignorance*,

19 *so kāyo na hoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

19 that body of his does not exist conditioned
by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;

20 *sā vācā na hoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

20 that speech of his does not exist *conditioned
by which there arise internal pleasure and pain;*

21 *so mano na hoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ*

21 that mind of his does not exist *conditioned
by which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*⁵¹

22 *khettaṃ*⁵² taṃ na hoti, yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ

22 There is for him no field⁵³ *conditioned by
which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*

23 *vatthuṃ* taṃ na hoti, yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ

23 There is for him no land *conditioned by
which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*

24 *āyatanaṃ* taṃ na hoti, yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ

24 There is for him no base *conditioned by
which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*

25 *adhikaraṇaṃ* taṃ na hoti yaṃ paccayā'ssa
taṃ uppajjati ajjhataṃ sukha,dukkhaṃ'ti

25 There is for him no foundation *conditioned
by which there arise internal pleasure and pain.*

— evaṃ —

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⁵⁰ *Imesu ... dhammesu avijjā anupatitā*, lit, "Ignorance is included in these states." Comy: Ignorance is included among these states under the heading of "decisive support" (*upanissaya*). For, they are all understood under the phrase, "with ignorance as condition, there are volitional formations." (SA 2:58). On the interpretation of dependent arising by way of the 24 conditional relations of the Paṭṭhāna, see Vism 17: see Nyanatiloka, *Guide Through the Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, 1971:159-173.

⁵¹ Comy: No such body exists where it would enable pleasure and pain to arise conditioned by bodily volition: the same applies to speech and mind. (Question:) But an arhat acts, speaks and thinks, show how is it that his body, etc, do not exist? (Reply:) In the sense, that they do not create karmic results. For, the deeds done by an arhat are neither wholesome nor unwholesome karma, but merely functional (*kiriya,matta*); thus, for him, it is said: "that body, etc, do not exist." (SA 2:58). On the arhat's functional consciousness, see Abhs:BRS 1.15.

⁵² These paragraphs (§§22-25) recur at (**Kamma,vāda**) **Bhūmija S** (S 12.15,19.2), SD 31.2.

⁵³ Comy: There is no *field* (*khetta*) in the sense of a place of growth; no *land* (*vatthu*), in the sense of a support; no *base* (*āyatana*) in the sense of a condition; no *foundation* (*adhikaraṇa*), in the sense of a cause. (SA 2:59)